

practices, I am quoting, "did not strike an appropriate balance between the efforts to assist community development and the need to assure," and this is the part that I just, again, I insist, when you read things like that, you wonder why the Democrats insist with such passion to raise the taxes on hard-working American taxpayer. Because this says, again, that there was no balance, no appropriate balance between the efforts to assist community development and the need to assure that the Federal taxpayers received reasonable consideration for property transferred to the local CROs. In fact, the audit says, we found that the taxpayers were frequently shortchanged in this process.

Yet, the Democrats want to raise the hard-working American people's taxes to do more of this kind of thing.

The audit continues, it says, In February 2002, a rig was, a drill rig was sold to the local CRO for \$50,000 that is now being offered for sale by an out-of-state equipment broker for \$3.9 million. You better believe the taxpayer was shortchanged and, yet, the Democrats insist on wanting to raise the taxes of the American people. It said that this group transferred hundreds of pieces of equipment, including trucks, office machines and trailers, purchased, by the way, by taxpayers, to the CROs for \$1 per transfer. And this is the part which is even harder to believe, Mr. Speaker.

It said, it provided laboratory equipment to the CRO that was needed at another department site, ultimately causing the Department to spend \$2.5 million to replace the equipment that they had basically given away. Another \$2.5 million to purchase that equipment a second time because it was given away. Nothing happens.

Now, the President is trying to change that, and he is aggressively trying to change that. We are going to have a debate tomorrow in the Committee on the Budget where we are going to try to stop this abuse. We are going to try to cut waste, fraud, and abuse. I hope that our dear friends on the Democratic side this year, for a change, do not propose amendments to raise taxes, to increase spending, but will join us in trying to cut waste, protect the American taxpayer. I do not have great faith, because they have not done so. That is not in their culture and their tradition.

I hope they do so, because the American taxpayer is fed up with waste, fraud, and abuse. They want help in cutting that waste, fraud, and abuse. All of us are going to have a great opportunity tomorrow in the Committee on the Budget in the markup.

I hope our dear friends on the Democratic side will not side with the constant increases of taxes, and will side with us to cut waste, fraud, and abuse, to seriously try to control that part of the budget, not increase taxes, not increase spending, spending more money, more good over bad over good over bad money, but will join us to not raise

taxes as they have always wanted to do, but instead will join us to keep the taxes low, to keep the child credits intact, to keep the death penalty tax from going up. As one of our colleagues said, there at least should be no taxation without respiration. And they will have an opportunity tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, let us see what they will do. I hope that they will join us in fighting for the taxpayer, not fighting for more waste and more tax increases.

VETERANS HEALTH CARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, I would like to address my colleagues from Texas and Florida who have just spoken and called themselves the Waste Watchers, and they listed all of these wasteful actions of government, and then they said that Democrats want to raise taxes. I would like to remind them that their party controls the presidency. Their party controls this House. Their party controls the Senate. And the last election in Florida demonstrates that their party controls the Supreme Court. If there is all of this waste, why does not their party get rid of it? Why blame the Democrats for something that their party is responsible for doing? I just point out that the Republican party is in charge and, therefore, the Republican party is responsible for the waste that my colleague detailed before us tonight.

I would like to speak tonight about veterans health care. I attended a Committee on Veterans Affairs meeting today where the Veterans of Foreign Wars spoke before our committee. And those veterans are asking why it is that we are spending billions and billions of dollars to Iraq. \$87 billion the last time we got a request from the President. He is going to come back and ask for probably \$50 billion more following the November election, and yet, we are nickel and diming our veterans.

We have said priority 8 veterans can enroll in the VA health care system. The President actually sent us a budget during this time of war, and in the President's budget, he is asking that for many of our veterans, the cost of a prescription drug be increased from \$7 a prescription to \$15 a prescription. Now, for a veteran that is on a fixed income and may have 6 or 8 or 10 prescriptions a month, that is a heavy, intolerable burden.

The President's budget also asks that there be a user fee imposed upon veterans, a user fee of \$250 per year, just so many of our veterans can participate in the VA health care system. And then we have a request in the President's budget to increase the cost of a clinic visit for our veterans. We are piling burden upon burden upon burden on the backs of our veterans. I simply do not understand why we would do this.

In a time of war, when we are creating new veterans, many disabled, veterans with terrible injuries, veterans who have lost their arms and legs, many have been blinded, terribly disfigured, these are veterans who have newly fought for our country, and we are giving them a VA health care system that is woefully underfunded.

I simply do not understand why the President does not step up to the plate and put his actions behind his rhetoric and say, I am willing to pay whatever it takes to provide adequate health care for the men and women who have fought and suffered for this country. I call upon the President tonight to rethink his priorities. Rather than spending money to send a man to Mars, we ought to be spending money to take care of our veterans.

I have shared this with my colleagues in the Committee on Veterans Affairs. A couple of weeks ago I went to Walter Reed Hospital. I visited a young man from my district who joined the military when he was 17 years of age. On his 19th birthday, while standing guard duty in Baghdad, a truck bomb exploded and removed a large part of one side of his face. This young man who is only 19 years of age was at Walter Reed getting reconstructive surgery on his face. He is just one of thousands, and there probably sadly will be thousands more in the future.

This Congress, this President, those of us of both political parties, should put the needs of our disabled, sick, and needy veterans at the top of our priority list. I call upon all of us, myself included, to make our veterans our number 1 priority.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Michigan (Mrs. MILLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. MILLER of Michigan addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

REAUTHORIZATION OF THE TRANSPORTATION EQUITY ACT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to discuss the reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century.

Mr. Speaker, in regards to transportation, we are indeed at a crossroads in this country. We have the intersection of the demands for creating the type of infrastructure which will facilitate commerce and move our citizenry, and trying to achieve some type of rational spending limits within our Federal budget.

Back home in my area of north Texas, we face a silent crisis. This crisis is unrecognized by residents until